

## 6. A LARGE CONGREGATION OF COTTON TEAL *NETTAPUS COROMANDELIANUS* OBSERVED AT CHILIKA LAKE, ORISSA, INDIA<sup>1</sup>

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On January 11, 2003, one of us (PS) participated as a group leader of one of the 14 groups formed among the participants of the Mid-winter Waterfowl Count organised by the Chilika Wildlife Division at Chilika Lake, Orissa. The area allotted to the group was Tinimuhani, the confluence point of the three tributaries of Mahanadi, namely the Daya, Bhargavi and Nuna, in the northern sector of the Lake. The bulk of the freshwater inflow into the Lake is through these three tributaries. The census team left Balipatpur Jetty (19° 0.92' N; 85° 0.49' E) at 0900 hrs. PS was counting the bird numbers species-wise and D.K. Parmanik, an Assistant Conservator of Forests, was recording the numbers in the field notebook. Around 1200 hrs the group approached a major bird congregation area at Tinimuhani. The area was filled with waterfowl; predominantly – Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*. Over one thousand Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* over-flying and often resting on the fish net poles were also observed. We counted about 5,400 Cotton Teals.

When SB visited the same area for a fortnightly bird monitoring along with PS during the first week of March, the former saw about 1,600 Cotton Teals. When PS mentioned the earlier sighting of 5,400 birds to SB, during the Mid-winter Waterfowl Count, he was surprised. We realised that this record was the largest known congregation of this species.

The HANDBOOK (Ali and Ripley 1983) records 500 birds as the congregation of Cotton Teal in an area. Sridharan (1989) recorded 562 individuals of the species from the Keoladeo National Park. It is worth to mention that Benthall and Craven (1950) stated that the Cotton Teal was scarce in the Chilika Lake. Moreover, this record of 5,400 Cotton Teal is also more than 5.4% of its biogeographical population as per the estimates given by the Wetlands International Waterbird Estimates of 2006 (Wetlands International 2006). On another occasion a total of 5,200 birds were recorded by SB during the first week of January 2006 from the same area. These records suggest that a large occurrence of Cotton Teal at Chilika is regular, not occasional. This also highlights the importance of the Chilika lake for the resident waterfowl species, besides its global importance of holding the largest migratory waterbird congregation in India.

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